

Teaching and Learning: Giving Back

By Cheryl A. Lindeman, Ed.D., Central Virginia Governor's School for Science and Technology

We teachers enjoy the benefits of having former students return into our lives. With today's social media the connections are instant and/or searchable. I make an effort to stay in touch with our graduates and offer to buy a meal if I am in the neighborhood. During the reconnection process I learn so many things about their adventures, research, and views on life. Let's call it authentic continuing education!

One former student named Janice Hobbs has remained in contact with me and has shared her journey to become a physician. While attending the University of Virginia she participated in one of the diversity panel discussions during the NCSSSMST Professional Conference held at the North Carolina School of Science and Math. Every summer I receive an email with her updates. Most of notes were comments about her next challenge—MCATs, buying a home, residency matching, projects, and awards.

Dr. Hobbs recently announced her appointment as chief resident at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia, so I decided it was the ideal time to invite her to be our alumnus "Mega-Lecture" speaker with our current juniors and seniors. She graciously accepted and then asked, "So what do you want me to say?" I asked her to tell her story and to share a message.

She immediately connected with students. "I am so delighted to be able to speak to you all today. Although I am a physician, I feel like it was just yesterday that I was sitting in your seat." I remembered that she helped with our middle school day program and she connected with young students as well with her warm smile. She also had practice talking with young people during her involvement with an after-school mentoring program for high school students when she was at UVA.

Being upfront about what it takes to be successful in college and what it takes to follow a premed path, her emphasis was on what she gleaned from her specialized science high school experience that made her successful at the university level.

- The scientific method is part of your life.
- Time management is your survival skill.
- Exposure to new technologies is critical.
- Know how to study as an independent learner.
- Teamwork- you can't avoid it.

Her bottom line to them: you are set apart because you go to college equipped with these skills. It was reinforcing to hear this. As we create our specialized programs we incorporate activities to develop these habits of mind. For our students, hearing this information from a successful graduate made the message empowering.

She next focused on her expertise - "Pediatrics, Preemies, and Becoming a Physician." It was very clear she enjoys the teaching and learning aspects of her career. "As a pediatrics resident, the goal is to make you the best general pediatrician possible. So you rotate in multiple areas of the hospital. My favorite is the well baby nursery and the units." Her mentor is the famous neonatologist, Dr. Maria Delivoria Papadopoulos, who was the first physician to ventilate neonates. Dr. Hobbs' embedded message - your mentor can be any age! She continued to captivate her audience by imparting further knowledge about childhood obesity, HIV, and neonates.

As we expose our students to STEM career options, many times our students are attracted to high paying jobs. Dr. Hobbs shared a different slant. "I am a pediatrician and truly believe it's the best job in the world. Children are hilarious and truly are resilient and I enjoy the opportunity to



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watch them grow up. ...The work hours can be tough. Most weeks, I definitely can work up to 80 hours...About a year ago, I was asked to be chief resident. It's a selection process by the supervising physicians and your fellow colleagues – so I was flattered. Next year, I will be in charge of 80 residents – planning their schedules, supervising an inpatient pediatrics team, teaching medical students/residents, and participating in multiple academic projects." At this point in the presentation I was smiling like a Cheshire cat. She made the real teaching and learning connection.

Her closing words echoed what we want all our students to follow.

- Find a mentor.
- Always prepare for the future.
- Make personal goals.
- Time management is critical.
- Work hard, play hard!
- Never be afraid to ask for help.
- Don't let anyone discourage you.

I think the last suggestion is one that we must emphasize with our under-served students and with students in our outreach programs. Our graduates help us see the world around us using a new lens. Dr. Hobbs' presentation illustrates how



Janice Hobbs, MD, MPH CVGS Class of 1999 and Tim Kimble, CVGS Class of 2011

we can utilize the experiences and skill sets of our alumni to captivate our current students. The presentation format – sharing educational paths, expertise, and wisdom, along with reflections about their educational paths at a specialized science high school - serves as a wonderful learning experience for everyone. Teaching and learning may be evolving into a broader learning community than we ever imagined.



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